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SUBJECT: A/S GORDON'S AUGUST 13 VISIT TO ESTONIA

CLASSIFIED BY: Karen B. Decker, Charge d'Affaires, State, EXEC;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Classified by: CDA Karen Decker, reasons 1.4(b/d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In his first official visit to Tallinn on August 13, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon and Estonian FM Urmas Paet discussed a wide range of issues and agreed there was much the U.S. and Estonia could do together to reinforce democracy in Eastern Europe. On Afghanistan, Paet pledged Estonia's continued support and highlighted Estonia's interest in future missions on the ground that would partner Estonian and American troops. Paet responded favorably to A/S Gordon's assurances that while the U.S. and Russia would "re-set" relations, the U.S. would not abandon its core principles. Paet told Gordon that Estonia supported U.S. participation in the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and said the Estonian Cabinet should decide in early September on accepting Guantanamo detainees. The two also discussed energy security, reform in Belarus, cyber security, NATO, and Baltic Air Policing. Following their meeting, A/S Gordon and FM Paet held a joint press conference. Gordon also met with Estonian MP Mart Laar (a signatory of the "open letter") and reiterated that the U.S. would stand by its friends. END SUMMARY.

U.S.-ESTONIAN RELATIONS ARE STRONG

¶12. (U) Foreign Minister Paet welcomed A/S Gordon to Tallinn on August 13, emphasizing that the bilateral relationship was strong, with close communication and cooperation between Washington and Tallinn. He praised the June meeting between Presidents Obama and Ilves as an excellent example of the close relationship and said he looked forward to his scheduled meeting with the Secretary on September 17 in Washington.

AFGHANISTAN: MORE JOINT MISSIONS

¶13. (C) Paet noted recent local press reports that Estonia currently had the highest deployment percentage (13.5 percent) per capita in Afghanistan of any NATO country. He assured A/S Gordon that the Government of Estonia (GOE) was committed to the ISAF mission for

the long term. Looking ahead to 2010 (and beyond), Paet stated that Estonia was thinking about ways to continue serving directly with U.S. forces (in addition, not instead of, its longstanding deployment with UK forces in Helmand). For instance, the GOE was looking at an Embedded Training Team (ETT) for the Afghan Army, and hoped to staff an OMLT (together with the Maryland National Guard) in 2011. (Note: In the press conference, a journalist asked where, after Afghanistan, the Estonian military could work directly with the U.S.).

¶4. (C) Paet also briefed Gordon on the GOE's civil assistance to Afghanistan, including its medical expert in Helmand Province, and its contributions to the Afghan National Army Fund. Closer to home, Paet offered Estonia's ports and transport network for the delivery of supplies to forces in Afghanistan. A/S Gordon thanked Paet for Estonia's strong support for the Afghanistan mission, and said the USG would work closely with the GOE on future cooperation.

EVALUATING THE RUSSIAN THREAT

¶5. (C) Paet expressed concern about Russia's new draft law on the use of force abroad, though he admitted that many countries have such a law, and that in certain cases (terrorism or piracy), Russia's law might make sense. He agreed with Gordon, however, that there was a difference when such a law (like the U.S. doctrine on preemption) came from a democratic country. After the war in Georgia, and following Russian statements about protecting Russian passport holders abroad, however, Estonia looked at this draft law with a jaundiced eye.

¶6. (C) In response to Paet's question about the "reset" with Russia, Gordon explained that President Obama's visit to Russia had launched a number of agreements, but that the real test would be implementation. He reiterated that the USG would cooperate with Russia where practical, while remaining clear about areas of disagreement. Part of the USG strategy, Gordon explained, was to give Moscow more of a stake in the relationship so that it would not want to jeopardize that relationship through negative policies. One troubling issue remained achieving progress on the Adapted Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). Paet agreed that Russia did not seem open to compromise, and Gordon reiterated that the U.S. would not make concessions on the flank areas.

U.S. OBSERVERS IN GEORGIA?

¶7. (C) Both Paet and Gordon expressed satisfaction that the anniversary of the Georgian-Russian conflict had passed relatively quietly, despite PM Putin's recent trip to Abkhazia. A/S Gordon reiterated the strong USG support for Georgia (high-level visits, launching of the Strategic Charter, and USD one billion in assistance). At the same time, there was no military solution to the separatist regions. Gordon said the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was critically important for both sides in Georgia. The U.S. was glad the EU extended its mandate by another year. Paet agreed, noting that the international presence in Georgia was the most effective difference from a year ago. At the last GAERC, he said, Estonia, Lithuania and others proposed opening the EUMM to third countries, such as the U.S. This will likely be discussed further at the September or October GAERCs. Gordon reiterated USG support for the EUMM, but said that for now the U.S. was not pushing to join.

GTMO DETAINEES

¶ 8. (C) Paet briefly mentioned that he continued to discuss inside the GOE the USG request that Estonia resettle detainees from Guantanamo. He had spoken to the Minister of Interior earlier in the day. He told Gordon that the GOE's evaluation process was on-going, and he expected a Cabinet decision in early September.

ENERGY SECURITY = DIVERSITY

¶ 9. (C) Paet welcomed USG interest in Europe's energy security, (Nabucco), saying he found it ironic that the U.S. was often more interested in this than was Europe. Estonia fully supported the proposed U.S.-EU Energy Council. Paet explained the main challenge for Estonia was to link its electrical grid with Europe. He further explained that while Estonia imported all of its gas from Russia, gas only made up less than 20 percent of Estonia's energy supply. Estonia generated almost all of its electricity from domestic oil shale. Estonia was working with Latvia and Lithuania to replace Lithuania's Ignalina nuclear plant. Lack of political will in Lithuania had slowed progress, so Estonia was considering building its own nuclear power plant. With multiple plants in the region (Finland, Russia), this might not make economic sense, but the issue was under discussion in the GOE.

CHANGE IN BELARUS? LET'S ENCOURAGE IT!

¶ 10. (C) When asked his assessment of Belarus, Gordon noted that Minsk had recently taken some positive steps (releasing political prisoners, easing some repression on the media and NGOs, not recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia). While he was going to Minsk to see whether relations could improve, the U.S. would not lift sanctions until it saw improvements in the human rights situation. Paet expressed his own hope of reform, while noting that Lukashenko's goal was to remain in power. Paet related that Lukashenko had been especially irked when Moscow banned the importation of Belarusian milk this summer, "treating Belarus like Ukraine or Georgia." While the GOE will not forget about Belarus' human rights violations of the past 15 years either, the GOE was also looking to improve relations, and was upgrading its consulate to an embassy to help "lure Minsk to the West."

¶ 11. (C) Paet praised the new spirit of cooperation between the Obama Administration and the EU, and said this close cooperation could facilitate support for rule of law in countries like Belarus. He added that Estonia businessmen find it easier to do business in Belarus than in Ukraine, possibly because Belarus only has one oligarch. Even without any real political ties, Estonian trade with Belarus now exceeds trade with Ukraine. Paet and Gordon agreed they should look for ways (bilaterally and through EU mechanisms like the Eastern Partnership) for ways to continue to encourage democratization in Belarus, especially in the run-up to the U.S.-EU Summit.

SECURITY ROUND-UP

¶12. (SBU) Paet invited the U.S. to "join" Estonia's Cyber Defense Center as a sponsoring nation, and suggested bilateral talks between Estonian and USG experts on cyber defense. (Note: The USG has a USN civilian at the center currently, but has not yet become a sponsor. Approval rests with DoD.) Stressing the importance of NATO's Article V, Paet thanked the USG for its participation in Baltic Air Policing and called the program "crucial for Estonia's defense." Paet also thanked the USG for supporting the pan-Baltic representative to the group developing NATO's new Strategic Concept. He added, finally, that Estonia would appreciate USG support for its 2012 candidacy to the UN Human Rights Committee and in 2020 when it wants to become a member of the UN Security Council.

MART LAAR AND THE OPEN LETTER

¶13. (U) Following the meeting with Paet, A/S Gordon met with Estonian MP (and former Prime Minister) Mart Laar. Laar, a signatory of the "open letter" defended the substance of the letter and reiterated his desire to see the U.S. maintain its leading role as the defender of democracy in Europe. A/S Gordon assured Laar that the U.S. would never abandon its friends.

¶14. (U) Media coverage of A/S Gordon's visit was wide and positive, in both Estonian and Russian-language media outlets (e-mailed separately to EUR/NB).

¶15. (U) A/S Gordon has cleared this message.

DECKER